



My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Many people can find today's Gospel disturbing – Why wouldn't Jesus answer this Canaanite woman? Why did Jesus insult her by calling her a dog? While we don't know the full answer to this – we may only know in heaven – I have some thoughts that may shed some light on this.

Before we move into my thoughts on the passage, though, I invite you to look at your own thoughts. Our faith tells us that Jesus is God, not just another good teacher. If He is God, then He is all knowing and *all loving*. Very often, our assumption about a passage like this is that Jesus is being rude. Yet, our faith shows us that Jesus is *loving* this woman in just the way she needs to grow into the person she was made to be. If we accept this with faith, then we can approach the Scripture humbly asking God to reveal what He is doing here, how His love is being manifested.

My thoughts on the passage are that Jesus is trying to draw out the faith of the woman, and in each of us as well. We speak very easily of trusting Jesus and having faith. But faith isn't faith when things are easy – rather, faith needs to be *tested* to be genuine faith. This woman comes to Jesus begging for His help. Matthew tells us that "Jesus did not say a word in answer to her" (Matthew 15:23). This is often the experience we have with God – we pray, we beg Him for something, but it seems He is silent. "Does God really hear me?!" can be our cry. Yet, Jesus does hear us – He hears every prayer of our hearts, He knows our every action, every word, and He knows each hair on our head. Sometimes He is silent, though, because silence may be the only way for us to grow. If He gave us every good thing immediately, we might focus on the gift and not the Giver. An example: if you have an ice-cream cone for a child, when he comes to take it, he'll be looking only at the ice-cream. But if you hold it out of his reach, eventually, he'll have to look at *you*. God loves us so much and wants our good, but our greatest good is not the gifts He gives, but relationship with Him. By delaying His gifts, He gives us the opportunity to look at Him, not just His gifts.

After Jesus' silence to the woman, he seems to rebuff her "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Mt 15:24). Sometimes, the circumstances seem to be God rebuffing us. Yet, the Lord is asking us to persevere. Do we trust His love? This Canaanite woman persevered – "Lord, help me" and then when called a dog, she countered with "Please, Lord, for even the dogs eat the scraps that fall for the table of their masters" (Mt 15:25, 27). Her perseverance is rewarded, not only with the healing of her daughter, but with such praise as is rarely given by Jesus, "O woman, great is your faith!" (Mt 15:28).

Her faith was tested, and through the testing it was purified and strengthened.

We so often give up when Jesus tests our faith. Too often, we turn from God or don't persevere in prayer. It is just in those times when it seems that God doesn't hear us, that He is leaning down close to us, hoping we keep on praying, keep on trusting. Yes, we may be asking for the wrong things, but by our perseverance in prayer, He will purify our asking, and open us to receive the true gift that God wants to give us – the gift of Himself.

Let us pray that we have the courage to undergo the testing of faith – that we may persevere through the silence of God, and allow Him to purify us, so that we may receive His very self.